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Memory activism: methods of creation of alternative collective memory in former Yugoslavia and Israel

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Memory plays a major role in the lives of individuals and societies. Since the 1980s there has been a growing "memory boom"[1] in public and private life; nation-states use the past to sure up their legitimacy leading social scientists to make memory studies an important field of research. Media, the Internet, and easy access to the archives has popularized history and increased interest in the individual and collective past. At the same time, a growing individualization within modern Western societies makes the collective memory of communities more problematic and opaque. Our shared history and memories are not as commonly passed down in the process of socialization by families and communities but are increasingly dependent on state-sponsored education systems and the media. Ollick notices the changes mentioned above, observed in culture and social life, leading to a shift in thinking from the past as a reservoir to learn *from* to the past as a subject to learn *about*[2].

The development of technology also brings new forms of collective commemoration – the internet became in recent decades a primary source of historical narratives and learning about the past; new interactive monuments and museums are intended to make the experience of dominant memory narratives even more attractive, engaging and personal. Nevertheless, people still find it necessary to help their memory by interpreting artifacts and other signs of the past. Those shared symbols (monuments, museums, commemorative plaques) that we pass every day, play a significant part in shaping the collective memory of our communities and societies. The collective memory of the past of the nation – such as battles, atrocities, victimhood, and braveness – are connected to national identity and are one of the most valuable tools for shaping social bonds. As Gillis shows, the "notion of identity depends on the idea of memory, and vice versa."[3] But what is important is that this collective memory

1 Olick, Jeffrey, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy, ed. *The Collective Memory Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. pp. 2 – 4.

2 Ibidem.

3 Gillis, John R. "Introduction: Memory and Identity: the History of a Relationship." *Commemorations.* Ed. John R. Gillis. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1994. pp. 3 – 26.

is not stationary and stable, it is dynamic, socially constructed and subjective[4]. The relationship of identity and memory is inseparable: the identity of individuals and communities depends on remembering, and how memories are created and remembered depends on identity. Therefore, commemoration shapes and is shaped by the society and is intertwined with the group identity and national memory. Collective memory gives a sense of common development to distinct groups because it organizes the past, simplifying complexities and showing the shared experiences – even if they were shared by great-grandparents and not the current generation[5].

Societies are bonded by their shared collective memories, and in most nations, there is a dominating political elite view on the past – a master collective memory[6]. Most of the time it is simultaneously an official, state-sponsored memory, produced to "maintain social cohesion and defend symbolic borders."[7] It is expressed by national calendars, monuments, and museums financed by the state and an educational system, especially the official history curriculum[8]. But hegemonic, state-sponsored collective memories, as they are used to build a particular dominant narrative and national identity, often exclude certain events – especially those that conflict with the nation or the state's positive self-image or that presented to the public. In such cases, memories of the victims, state-sponsored atrocities, and other acts of violence are suppressed and removed from official commemoration and memory discourse. That suppression usually comes from political interests: states avoiding moral, legal, or political responsibility for certain events or trying to maintain control over society. Nevertheless, the past is rarely forgotten, and while in official narratives specific facts tend to be excluded or even denied, usually certain members of the society – memory activists – take it upon themselves to raise awareness, introduce critical thinking, and try to widen the public memory discourse.

Memory activism often takes the form of political protest against official narratives and the forced forgetting or silencing of certain events in official memory discourses[9]. My aim here is to categorize several of the key methods used by memory activists to introduce and produce alternative knowledge and to create the alternative collective memories. In this article, I compare the actions of memory activists and NGOs in former Yugoslavia and work of Israeli memory activists and NGOs (especially Zochrot and De-Colonizer), as in those contexts memory work plays

4 Dragović-Soso, Jasna. "Conflict, Memory, Accountability: What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" *Conflict and Memory: Bridging Past and Future in [South East] Europe.* Ed. Wolfgang Petritsch and Vedran Džihić. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010. pp. 29 – 46.

5 Zerubavel, Yael. *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the making of Israeli National Tradition*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997. pp. 3 – 12.

6 Ibidem.

7 Jelin, Elizabeth. "State Repression and the Labors of Memory." Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. pp. 26 – 49.

8 Zerubavel, Eviatar. *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012. pp. 315 – 337.

9 Gutman, Yifat. "Looking Backward to the Future: Counter-memory as Oppositional Knowledge--Production in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," *Current Sociology*, 2015. pp. 1 – 6.

a major role in peace and reconciliation activism. In description of memory activism in Serbia and Bosnia and Hercegovina I rely on Fridman's work, online resources and personal observations, while Israeli case studies are based largely on participant observation, as well as online resources. The analysis of the tools used by memory activists in those societies shows not only which specific events are being excluded from collective memory, but can also point out the ongoing power struggles, notably the marginalization of certain groups, and ways to combat them.

Political impact: state-sponsored memory

Establishing hegemonic collective memory by state-sponsored commemorative practices is always political, as it serves as a tool for shaping societal and national identity in a certain way[10]. It represents the political elites' interests and their views on the past, while the narrative of marginalized members of the society is suppressed. That said, we must be aware that memory narratives can be altered and manipulated to create the desired outcome, especially for political purposes, using narratives of victimhood, domination and exclusion. When talking about hegemonic collective memory we have also to remember that it does not only mean a memory that is actually created, commemorated, taught and state-supported. A facet of collective memory that can shape the society also comes in collective forgetting or denial. Gillis uses Benedict Anderson's term of "collective amnesia" to depict what he calls "common forgettings." In a rapidly changing world, with widening differences between the lives of successive generations, broad access to data and knowledge, as well as in moments of transition after violent conflicts or political shifts, it is necessary to forget individually and communally[11]. In certain moments, for example after World War II, nations were more encouraged to forget the past and commemorate new beginnings, in order to mark a change in political and social life, as well as distance themselves from the events that were considered shameful mistakes. At the same time, forgetting may be a strategy for reconciliation – for example Spain's "pact of forgetting" (a political agreement to "forget" the atrocities committed under Francoist repression)[12] seems to have been successful, though it is being challenged in the present generation. Establishing historical facts is usually the basis of commemorating, dealing with the past and atonement[13]. But if members of a society and marginalized groups within that society believe that the hegemonic, state-sponsored memory narrative is not their own, or that it is overly politicized, manipulated or creates an unfair society, one of the responses is to create counter-memory or alternative collective memory.

[10] Jelin, Elizabeth., op.cit.

[11] Gillis, John R., op.cit.

[12] Davis, Madeleine. "Is Spain recovering its memory? Breaking the Pacto del Olvido," *Human Rights Quarterly,* 27, 3, 2005. pp. 858 – 880.

[13] Dragović-Soso, Jasna., op.cit.

Memory activism and methods of building alternative collective memory

Counter-memory is usually created through memory activism, which Gutman defines as "a knowledge-based effort for consciousness-raising and political change" and "commemoration of a contested past in order to influence public debate, primarily towards greater equality, plurality and reconciliation."[14] Memory activism focuses on the production of alternative knowledge outside of state channels, in order to influence public debate and reshape the collective memory. That memory work is done by activists involved in symbolic transformation and is especially visible in conflict and post-conflict societies. It may be used as part of the transitional justice work, peacebuilding or work that develops human rights and social justice[15]. Through such memory work, it becomes clear how the hegemonic memories, created and expressed by official state practices, can conflict with alternative memories promoted and created by marginalized groups. That conflict is subject to power relations and power struggles in the society, as counter-memory stands then in opposition to master collective memory. Memory activists, therefore, use methods and tools to create alternative collective memory, encourage social awareness and challenge official narratives. Some of those tools are described below:

Production of knowledge and education

One of the aims of memory activists and NGOs is to produce counter-informative knowledge outside the state channels in order to influence public debate. That is achieved by exposing the public to facts from the past that aren't present in the hegemonic memory and discourse[16]. One of the distinct ways to produce and promote counter memories and counter knowledge is through education. The school system is one of the institutions of what Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatus, whose purpose is to convey and reassert official state narratives. And as the state-sponsored collective memory is based in large part on state education systems, one of the ways to challenge it is to create complementary approaches to disseminate knowledge.

An example of an organization focused on challenging official educational practice and introducing counter-memory into teaching is the Israeli NGO Zochrot. Zochrot ("remembering" in Hebrew) has worked "since 2002 to promote acknowledgement and accountability for the ongoing injustices of the *Nakba*, the Palestinian catastrophe of 1948 and the reconceptualization of the Return as the imperative redress of the *Nakba* and a chance for a better life for all the country's inhabitants."[17] *Nakba* is a Palestinian term referring to the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 when approximately 700.000 - 800.000 (85%) of the Palestinians living inside the borders of

[14] Gutman, Yifat., op.cit.
[15] Jelin, Elizabeth., op.cit.
[16] Gutman, Yifat., op.cit.
[17] "Who we are." *Zochrot*. N.p. , n.d. Web. 30 May 2016.

what is now Israel were expelled to neighboring countries, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Hundreds of Palestinian villages were partially or entirely destroyed and depopulated, in some cases, massacres were reported[18]. While the Palestinian collective memory is focused on *Nakba* as a point of reference[19], at the same time in Israeli collective memory until recently the fate of Palestinian residents who were expelled in 1948 was non-existent, with no place for it in hegemonic memories or official historical education.

A surge in memory activism in Israel, which focused on commemorating the *Nakba*, emerged only in 1998, on the 50th anniversary of the 1948 war. Memory activists and their NGOs in Israel, then started to produce counter-hegemonic knowledge, publicly showing facts that until that time were not present in the Jewish-Israeli hegemonic memory. Zochrot became an increasingly important and influential organization working to introduce the *Nakba* into Israel's education system, with the purpose to change the public memory discourse. Its main aim is to raise awareness in Israeli society of the facts that are entirely omitted in the hegemonic collective memory, expecting that ultimately this knowledge will lead to acknowledgment and accountability for the Palestinian catastrophe in 1948, as well as allowing the refugees of the 1948 crisis to return to their homeland. Education is used as an important tool to achieve that aim; examples include tours to destroyed villages[20], creating publicity through media, and publishing maps and reports. Similar tools are used by another Israeli NGO De-Colonizer[21], which is utilizing academic research to disseminate knowledge[22]. Nevertheless, educational and informative actions of both those organizations are still marginalized voices with limited impact, as their work can complement the official education system only for those who already know about the *Nakba* and want to broaden their knowledge.

Mapping and documentation of sites, virtual monuments

Zochrot and De-Colonizer also work in another important sphere for memory activism: documentation and mapping. Commemorating sites of events that are left unmarked, mapping memories and bringing forgotten sites into the spotlight are some of the ways to remember and create previously excluded counter-memories to

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18 Sorek, Tamir. *Palestinian Commemoration in Israel: Calendars, Monuments & Martyrs*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2015.

19 Abu-Lughod, Laila and Ahmad H. Sa'di. "Introduction: the Claims of Memory." *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*. Ed. Laila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. Sa'di, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. 1 – 26.

20 See more: Cook, Jonathan. "Canada Park and Israeli «memoricide»", *The Electronic Intifada, N.p.* 10 Mar. 2009. Web. 7 Jan. 2017.

21 De-Colonizer was founded by dr. Eleonore Merza and Eitan Bronstein Aparicio, who was also a founder and director of Zochrot.

22 "Research." *De-Colonizer*. N.p., n.d.. Web. 7 Jan 2017.

the official narratives[23]. Alternative mapping is is of particular importance and useful when certain places are deliberately being hidden and forgotten – such as Palestinian villages destroyed during the *Nakba*. Zochrot and other Israeli NGOs use both alternative maps and alternative tours to introduce the knowledge and memory of the *Nakba* into dominant narratives in Israel. De-Colonizer also employs modern technologies to discover destroyed villages and put their names back to maps[24].

Traditionally, battles for commemoration of certain sites excluded from official collective memory, focus on building monuments, hanging plaques or other forms of visible commemoration in public spaces. Sometimes activists erect signs or symbols in public spaces on their own, to mark events and places that are not recorded in collective hegemonic memory. In 2007, as part of an unofficial commemoration of the 59th anniversary of the *Nakba*, Israeli NGOs Zochrot, Bat Shalom and New Profile posted signs in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and Haifa, marking destroyed villages and other events of 1948 that took place in those sites[25].

Nevertheless, such "mnemonic battles"[26] of activists and officials (usually municipalities, governments or even private site owners not interested in commemorating the place, event or victims) are long and unsuccessful. Therefore, in recent years an innovative shift in memory activism towards using virtual spaces for commemoration can be observed.

One such interesting example comes from Serbia, where memory activists are fighting for the commemoration of Batajnica (located only 15 km from the center of Belgrade), where in 2001 a mass grave of more than 600 Kosovo civilians was found. It is one of the biggest mass graves from the 1990s Balkan wars; nevertheless, until now the burial place hasn't been officially commemorated or acknowledged. While the fight for a material commemoration of the site was unsuccessful, Batajnica memory activists introduced a new method of alternative commemoration – a virtual one. The Batajnica Memorial initiative is a memorial site in online reality, an immaterial monument presenting facts and documents relating to the Batajnica history. Batajnica activists are trying to bring awareness mostly through the collection of oral testimonies from family members of victims and publicizing them through the website and the idea of a virtual monument, hoping that creating alternative knowledge will lead to the creation of a tangible commemoration site at Batajnica[27].

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23 Davis, Rochelle. "Mapping the past, re-creating the homeland: Memories of village places in pre-1948 Palestine." *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*. Ed. Laila Abu-Lughod and Ahmad H. Sa'di, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007. pp. 53 – 75.

24 "Research.," op.cit.

25 Inbari, Itamar. „The Palestinian ‚Nakba' is coming to the streets of Israel", *Zochrot.*, N.p., 30 Apr. 2007, Web. 7 Jan. 2017.

26 Zerubavel, Eviatar. *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.ct. 2013,. Intifada,onic battlesędzynarodowerczyńców, specyficzne dla innej kultury albo w ogóle orientalistyczne, bo wymyślone p. 106 – 110.

27 "Initiative." *Batajnica Memorial Initiative*. N.p., n.d. Web. 12 Jul. 2016.

A similar virtual commemoration was prepared by Zochrot, through the introduction of a mobile iNakba application in Arabic, Hebrew and English to make knowledge about the *Nakba* more accessible and interactive. The application is based on GPS technology and "provides coordinates and maps of Palestinian localities that were completely ruined, destroyed, obliterated after their capture, partially demolished, or remained standing but were depopulated and their residents expelled."[28] Those virtual, alternative monuments are useful especially when local governing bodies, officials or power-holders are not interested in bringing back certain facts into collective memory and are actively blocking the struggle for commemoration.

Creating alternative calendars and taking over public space

Another method used by activists is to take over public spaces to organize commemorative rituals. As Zerubavel shows, official national calendars establish a particular framework for collective memory. The annually repeated official commemoration of certain events is also a part of socialization, one that Zerubavel calls "mnemonic socialization," shaping collective identities of members of the society[29]. Activists are challenging national calendars and dominant state-sponsored memory narratives by creating alternative commemorative rituals. If such actions are regularly repeated, are publicly visible and, importantly, are socially meaningful (i.e. carry a certain value and importance for the rest of the society), they can lead to creating alternative calendars, with annual commemoration of the events that are excluded from state narratives[30]. Fridman describes Serbian *Women in Black* movement as an excellent example of activists creating an alternative calendar[31]. *Women in Black* has organized public vigils since 1991, protesting the "regime's policy; nationalism; militarism and all forms of hatred, discrimination and violence."[32] The idea of public vigils was borrowed from Israeli *Women in Black*, who regularly protested since 1988 in Israeli public spaces against the occupation and the lack of political willingness to end it[33]. Serbian *Women in Black* reintroduced the idea of street activism in commemoration of events that are not mentioned in the official state calendar. For more than two decades they have brought up memory of suppressed events from local history, such as the siege of Sarajevo in 1992, the siege of Vukovar in 1991, as well as international celebrations like Women's International Day or International Day of Conscientious

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28 "iNakba App." *Zochrot*. N.p. , n.d. Web. 30 May 2016.

29 Zerubavel, Eviatar. "Calendars and History: A Comparative Study of the Social Organization of National Memory." *States of Memory: Continuities, Conflicts, and Transformations in National Retrospection*. Ed. Jeffrey Olick. Durham: Duke University, 2003. 315 – 337.

30 Zerubavel, Yael., op.cit.

31 Fridman, Orli. "Alternative calendars and memory work in Serbia: Anti-war activism after Milošević." *Memory Studies,* 8, 2, 2015. 212 – 226.

32 "Vigils in Serbia." *Women in Black*. N.p., n.d. Web. 7 Jul. 2016.

33 Ibidem.

Objectors. Nevertheless, they are primarily known for their regular commemorations of the Srebrenica massacre on 10th of July every year by silent vigils in the main square of Belgrade, the Republic Square. The Sarajevo massacre is not commemorated in hegemonic Serbian memory as genocide (in the official state narrative, it is described using expressions such as "horrific events"), and is absent in state-sponsored collective memory. The task of introducing memory of the Sarajevo massacre to collective discourse was undertaken by Women in Black, who "… are challenging that state narrative, trying to bring awareness in the society and influence the hegemonic collective memory in the name of the victims."[34] Fridman uses the example of *Women in Black* vigils to show the process of creation of alternative calendars by activists, who by repeated and visible commemoration of specific events managed to make their anniversaries recognizable by the wider public, therefore introducing them into the alternative collective memory of the society[35]. In effect, every year tens of people of all ages gather together in downtown Belgrade in memory of Srebrenica victims, "as if this day is now included in their (alternative) calendar."[36] But it is important to notice that by their regular presence in certain places they are at the same time creating an alternative public commemorative space. During the vigils, activists take over public space in city centers, creating a live monument built of people that cannot be passed unnoticed and cannot be ignored. Even if it disappears the day after, the fact of creating that visual reminder possibly adds up to the success of such initiatives in reshaping collective memory and awareness.

Similar memory work is being done around Omarska camp, near Prijedor in northern Bosnia and Hercegovina. Omarska used to be a mine, and was turned by Bosnian Serb forces into a concentration camp for non-Serbs at the beginning of the 1990s. The site now again serves as a mine, owned by international company ArcelorMittal, and it lacks any official commemoration symbols. Omarska is not memorialized as a concentration camp mostly due to the lack of interest or even negative approach of the local municipality and the mine owners. Activist group *Four Faces of Omarska* (*Radna grupa četiri lica Omarske*) is working on building a memorial on the grounds of the camp to challenge dominant narratives that deny the atrocities that took place there. Until now efforts to erect a memorial site on the grounds of the camp were unsuccessful, but former camp inmates and memory activists turned to an idea similar to *Women in Black* street activism – creating alternative commemoration rituals and taking over the contested space. Since 9th of May 2011 survivors of the camp, in spite of a lack of recognition by the officials and the mine owners, have been returning annually to the camp in memory of the victims[37]. Zerubavel[38] calls such sites in which alternative commemorative events take place, contested territories.

[34] Fridman, Orli., op.cit.
[35] Ibidem.
[36] Ibidem, p. 217.
[37] Ibidem.
[38] Y. Zerubavel., op.cit.

Fridman notices that these locations have a chance to become a space for public debate and reshape collective memories, while commemorative rituals taking place there are creating alternative calendars[39]. The regularity of this commemorative practice creates a local alternative calendar, as well as allows the victims and their families to raise awareness and to share their stories. At the same time, at least for a few hours every year create a monument in that place through their sheer presence.

Bosnian memory activists went even further in reclaiming the public space to raise awareness and commemorate events excluded from official narratives by introducing the idea of guerrilla memorials. In 2013 an ethnically mixed group "Because it Concerns Me" marked the memory of Serbian, Muslim and Croatian victims of 1992-1995 Bosnian War by illegally placing marble commemorative plaques in the 3 Bosnian towns of Foca, Bugojno and Konjic. They were erected at night in protest of the lack of official state acknowledgment of the war crimes and atrocities committed during the war in those and other places. The 70-kg plaques founded by members of the group were glued (and in Foca cemented) in public areas by activists, but removed by the authorities shortly after[40]. This kind of memory activism can also be studied as an example of the "right to the city" activism movements, as it aims to reclaim public space for the citizens.

Summary

Memory can be and is being used as a tool for shaping societies. States, politicians and elites create the hegemonic collective memory in order to mold collective identity and the sense of belonging amongst the people. Those hegemonic collective memories unify stories, leaving some events, facts and discourses intentionally out of the dominant narrative to facilitate self-identification with the perceived positive history of the collective. Memory activists take upon themselves the responsibility of bringing back into focus those excluded facts, events, and memories, hoping to create a more fair and just society and often to give communities a chance for post-conflict reconciliation.

The aim of memory activism is to introduce social change and often also a political one. Therefore the production of counter-memory often takes forms that assure visibility in the public sphere – to raise awareness either in the society or among political decision-makers, to change perceptions of national history or create more knowledge. Therefore, activists often use alternative commemoration methods where there is a void of certain memory in the public space. The methods vary and are ever-changing to exploit opportunities inherent in new technologies.

Traditional spheres of memory activism are education and documentation. Both create alternative knowledge in order to complement the state-sponsored memory

[39] Fridman, Orli., op.cit.

[40] Sito-Sucic, Daria. "Bosnian activists erect 'guerrilla memorials' to war crimes victims." *Reuters* 26 Oct. 2013. Web. 27 Jul. 2016.

creation, carried out through official education systems and state-sponsored historical documentation efforts. Another tool for memory activism is mapping and creating monuments to commemorate sites, events and people. As "memorialization is a process that satisfies the desire to honor those who suffered or died during a conflict and as a means to examine the past and address contemporary issues,"[41] marking the space with commemorative symbols is often a necessary step for post-conflict societies to overcome their traumatic pasts. Because of that, truth and reconciliation commissions (for example, in Chile, Guatemala, South Africa, Ghana, and Sierra Leone)[42] are calling for the physical commemoration of past atrocities as part of the healing process. Such commemoration of places and spaces (e.g. putting signs, plaques or erecting monuments) is often blocked by decision-makers if it is against political interests. Memory activists challenge that, and their efforts to mark public spaces with unofficial signs or pressuring decision makers to erect memorials have similar aims and come from an awareness of the needs of the society, or parts of the society, to deal with the troubled past in a visible way. As their efforts, especially to erect monuments, might be unsuccessful or meet with political unwillingness, memory activists have recently started to turn to modern technologies in order to bring attention to forgotten events. For example, they create virtual monuments and mobile apps to make their voices heard louder and their alternative knowledge and memory more interesting, interactive and accessible. Others turn to illegal city interventions, like erecting "guerrilla monuments" in order to mark suppressed events tangibly at least for a short time. Other activists focus their actions on organizing alternative commemoration rituals and alternative calendars to state-sponsored ones. Those rituals require the physical presence of activists and participants in the public sphere (sometimes taking over part of public space) or on the site of a particular event. That presence, usually made as visible to the public as possible in order to raise awareness, in itself creates a visual reminder of memorialized events, it becomes a short-lived organic monument made of people.

Looking at the above-mentioned cases we can see that memory activism uses a range of tools to create the alternative collective memory, makes suppressed voices heard and excluded memories shared. There is no place within the confines of this paper to analyze how successful those means are. Nevertheless it can be assumed that those tools that are used over a long period (like Zochrot's and De-Colonizer's education and documenting the efforts of the Palestinian *Nakba*, or Women in Black vigils in Belgrade in memory of Srebrenica) are effective enough (bring enough social change or fulfill their organizers' goals), to be continuously practiced over the years.

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41 Barsalou, Judy and Baxter Victoria. "The Urge to Remember: The Role of Memorials in Social Reconstructions and Transitional Justice." *Stabilization and Reconstruction Series 5*, Washington: United States Institute for Peace, 2007.

42 Ibidem.

One of the conclusions we can draw from the overview of memory activism methods described above is the need that many people have for a *material* commemoration. Memory activists create material knowledge in the form of monuments, books, and maps, as well as by taking over public spaces for vigils and guerrilla monuments. Even the creation of alternative calendars and rituals comes in the form of physically occupying certain spaces or areas by the activists in order to memorialize the event or people by being *tangibly present* in a specific time in a specific place. It shows that signs and symbols in the public space largely shape collective memory, and that through those means – reminding people of facts and memories – collective memory and awareness is shaped. On the other hand, when remaking a material space is impossible, memorialization in the virtual sphere is used to put more pressure on changing the analog reality. Nevertheless, virtual monuments seem to come mostly as tools to raise awareness, while the main aim is still erecting a tangible material monument.

Counter memory is always asymmetrical in comparison with hegemonic, state-sponsored collective memory because of hindered access to the public space and the limited ability of memory activists to take over space only for a certain amount of time. Nevertheless, their work is important not only in creating the alternative collective memory, surfacing suppressed narratives of minorities, or creating counter-discourses to the state ones but also in introducing critical thinking into the society and opening public space for discussion. These are some of the first important steps for reconciliation in divided and post-conflict societies.

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Summary

This paper aims at categorizing the tools used contemporarily by memory activists to create the alternative collective memories. By using examples of memory work done by activists in Israel and former Yugoslavia (Serbia and Bosnia and Hercegovina) I attempt to show methods employed by memory activists to produce alternative knowledge and counter-memory. The paper looks at examples of memory activism from the countries where activists and NGOs are currently engaged in large memory work, raising awareness about the past and the present, as well as commemorating facts suppressed through hegemonic collective-memory. The tools described here are divided into several categories, with a short analysis of the circumstances they are used in, to show contemporary memory work and activism and its outcomes.